1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

In the first place the Coorg individual is a member of a domestic group, the *okka* or patrilineal joint-family. His closest social ties are with this group and its members, and the well-being of this group is something that is for him of supreme importance. Each such group has its own religious cult. There are daily religious observances of the members of the joint family. There are recurrent occasions on which ritual performances are called for. Any event which affects the solidarity or well-being of the group is an occasion of ritual, such as in births, deaths, and marriages. Piety, for a Coorg, is in the first place the observance of the requirements of this domestic cult.

Dr. Srinivas has described for us the various features of this domestic cult, but he has done more than that. He has helped us to see the social function of these rituals as expressing and maintaining the solidarity and continuity of the structural system. Further, he has sought, with some considerable measure of success, to reveal the meaning of the ritual idiom of the Coorg domestic cult. In any system of ritual each ritual action has its meaning, and the totality of such meanings constitutes the idiom of that system. Just as different societies have different languages so also they have their systems of ritual idiom, and it is the task of the social anthropologist to investigate a system of ritual idiom in the same way that he studies a language. To understand the way a people talk it is necessary to know the idiom of their language; to understand a religion it is necessary to have some understanding of the ritual idiom in which they express their religious sentiments. We do not understand the Coorg domestic cult unless we understand the religious meaning to the Coorgs of the lamp hanging in the hall of the house; and other features of their rites and ceremonies.

Besides being a member of a joint family (*okka*) the Coorg individual is a member of a village community which includes not only persons of his own caste but also members of other castes. The village community has its own religious cult, with its god or gods and its temple or shrine or temples. The village-deities, when properly propitiated, protect the village and its inhabitants from smallpox and plague and other supernatural evils, and afford blessings such as good health and abundant crops. Thus the cult of the village-deities is a collective action of the community. Just as the domestic cult has for its ostensible aim the preservation of the well-being of the particular group, so the village cult has for its

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

aim the well-being of the village. Both these cults emphasize for an individual his membership of a particular social group, the joint family in the one instance and the village community in the other.

Three other features of social structure have to be considered in connexion with the village cult. In the first place, though the whole village community takes part in the ceremonies, different caste groups have different parts to play and are thus differentiated. Some, for example, take part in the animal sacrifice, while others have nothing to do with it. Thus a caste group within the village is able, within the cult, to establish its own unity and its separation from other groups. This is a significant feature of the caste structure of the village.

In the second place, though each village community has its own unity as exhibited in the cult performances, there is co-operation between different villages, and members of one may take part in the ceremonies of another. Thus the Coorg villages are groups within a single Coorg religious community. It is therefore not only the solidarity of the village that is exhibited in the village cult but also the religious solidarity and unity of the people of Coorg.

Thirdly, there is the fact that the local deities of the villages have been assimilated to the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, as when a particular local deity is identified with Shiva or Pārvati. In this way the Coorg religious community has become incorporated as a part of that wider Hindu religious community. The incorporation, however, is only partial. In an orthodox Hindu cult the temple should be served by a Brahmin. Orthodox Hindu deities are vegetarian and dislike alcohol. But some of the Coorg village-deities demand the blood and flesh of animals and offerings of toddy. What Dr. Srinivas calls the process of Sanskritization of the Coorg village cults is therefore very far from being complete. There are very important remains of paganism. This need not surprise us when we remember the many survivals of local paganism in the Christian countries. What is significant is that in his participation in the worship of the village-deities the Coorg individual is able to think of himself as a member of the widespread Hindu religious community.

The individual in Coorg belongs to a particular joint-family, and to a particular village, but in addition he belongs by birth to a particular social group of the kind to which we apply the name

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

epidemic or other disaster. Brahmins make only offerings of fruits and flowers even when propitiating such a deity.[1] (4) Deities propitiated by one or other of the lowest castes who are rarely propitiated by the upper castes. Such a deity is identified with the caste habitually propitiating him (or her).

Every temple has a headman called *dēva takka*, belonging to one of the high castes, who generally looks after the temple and its property. The *okkas* belonging to the high castes annually pay him a contribution in paddy and cash towards the maintenance of the temple. He, together with the village headman, organizes the elaborate festival of the deity. He has also certain ritual duties at the festival, which vary from village to village. His relation with the village headman too varies from village to village.

Formerly every important temple in a village seems to have had three permanent officials, Mukkāṭi, Neravaṇḍa, and Chengōla. Of these three the last two are defunct today, and only the first-mentioned Mukkāṭi still continues to exist. These offices were hereditary in certain *okkas* and these *okkas* generally belonged to a high caste like Coorg, Gauḍa, smith, and cowherd. The Chengōla looked after the accounts, and the Mukkāṭi swept the temple and lit the lamps, but we do not know what the duties of the Neravaṇḍa were. Mukkāṭi and Neravaṇḍa occur occasionally as surnames of certain Coorg *okkas*.

Every temple has pipers and drummers. These may belong to a high caste like Mārāyas, or a low caste like Mēdas or Poleyas.

In addition to the above, every temple of a village-deity has a number of *ṛāvukāras* or festival-priests who are active only during the periodical festival. All the high-caste[2] *okkas* in a village are usually festival-priests at the festival of their village-deity. This priesthood, like other offices, is attached to the *okka* and not to the individual members thereof. Both the men and the women of the priestly *okkas* have duties and roles at the festival. The men have such tasks as carrying the idol of the deity, bathing it, and holding

[1] It is possible, however, that in exceptional circumstances a Brahmin might make an offering of a fowl through a non-Brahmin friend. He might also take a wife, sister, or daughter, possessed by a ghost, to a non-Sanskritic temple for cure.

[2] As far as I know the Brahmin is nowhere festival-priest. He is either priest at the temple or performs only purificatory rites during the festival. In the latter case, there is another temple dedicated to a Sanskritic deity, where he performs all the priestly duties every day.

1: Srinivas
794 ●

AW5 Coorg AW5

[For information on the cult practices of the patrilineal extended family, or okka, see category 116, pp. 123-175.]

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

c. The Bhagavati-feast.

Of the two lesser annual festivals one, the Bhagavati-feast, has been introduced by Tulu Brahmans, or, if it was originally a Coorg observance, has been thoroughly brahmanized.

It takes place during the two months preceding the monsoon. Different localities differ in the time of its celebration. Two or three villages have one Bhagavati temple in common, and support it jointly. These temples are in charge of Brahmans entirely. Tulu Brahmans hold the livings; with them some Padárthis, a lower class of Brahmans, who wear no holy string, are associated as musicians to Bhagavati. The whole establishment is under the management of some Tantri-Brahmans in the Tulu country, who come every eighth or tenth year, to consecrate idols and to collect money. On these occasions large sums are offered by the superstitious. The Coorgs have an extraordinary dread of the power of these men. They say, that if one of the Tantri-Brahmans be offended and curse a man, he will lose his sight or hearing or even his life. It is enough, they believe, for one of these masters of the black art, to say to a man: "do you not see?" or "do you not hear?" and the poor fellow is doomed to blindness or deafness, or even death. Strange! It would appear, that the common worship of the great gods of the country was less degrading to the mind, and engendered a more cheerful kind of superstition, than this wild sort of idolatry, which has enslaved the poor Coorgs. The Tantrics, on one of their visits, will gather some two or three hundred rupees from the money-loving Coorgs. Sometimes an idol of Bhagavati has lost its power, when they re-enliven it. Or the officiating Brahman, who has played the possessed on festival days, has died. The Tantri has to appoint his successor. These services are not performed gratuitously; the presiding Tantri receives every year one half of the profits of the establishment, through a curate whom he leaves in charge.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

796 793 787 Some Coorg also is chosen as a subject for possession by Bhagavati. He likewise, and his successors, must be instituted by the ruling Tantri. They are selected from a small number of candidates presented by the community connected with the temple. The Tantri takes one of the men, pronounces some mantra and puts holy ashes upon his face, when immediately the individual commences to shake and to dance and to speak as one possessed.

346 793 794 Every house of the villages, connected with a temple, must pay an assessment in rice every year to the Brahmans employed, and money must be offered by every family, from 3 as. to one rupee, on the last day of the annual festival.

796 793 The Bhagavati-feast lasts nine days. During the first six days, every morning and evening, the idol is carried three times round the temple in procession, while the Tantri-curate, who is the chief authority in the place, performs púja, strewing rice and minced leaves of Calyptanthes Caryophyllifolia, mixed together, on the stones placed towards the eight regions of the heavens, and mumbling his mantras. One of the Tulu Brahmans carries the idol on his head; he is accompanied by the Púját and the other officers of the shrine, followed by the band of Padárthis, playing the drum, cymbal and gong, and preceded by the Coorg-man performing a frantic dance in the ecstasy of demoniac possession. Many people come on these occasions to put questions to Bhagavati in behalf of sick persons, or for the discovery of thieves, etc. which are duly answered by the Coorg spokesman of the goddess.

[786] [787]

796 786 [793] On the evening of the sixth day things take a more excited aspect. Now the Brahman idol-carrier also is seized with the strange inspiration. He dances and trembles, and answers questions by making signs only. On the same afternoon a crowd of Holeyas, who have finished the Pannangalamma-feast (a corresponding Holeya festival) come to the

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

796 piece given to him into a copper vessel, held by the Tantri.
[782] With the setting sun the business of the day is concluded.

The morning of the eighth day is devoted to the delivery of votive presents, as on the preceding day. At ten o'clock
[535] dances are performed by the young men, as on the seventh day. This continues till two o'clock, when all the good shots
796 assemble for shooting at a mark. A cocoanut is hung up in
526 some tree between two plantain-bunch-tops as a mark. He who hits the nut, is rewarded with a present of three annas and the honor of the name of a good marksman. Then one of the Takkas, or the Coorg-dancer before Bhagavati, distributes a number of cocoanuts (of which there is an abundance, as every family must bring one or two) to the young men. One seizes a nut between his hands, others try to take it out of his grasp. In a few moments the whole ground is filled
796 with parties struggling for cocoanuts. He who succeeds in forcing the nut out of the hands of the original possessor,
[788] carries it away as his prize. At three o'clock the idol-procession takes place again, after which all the men go with the idol to the river or the tank, to bathe the goddess and themselves.

Ninth day. From each house one person appears at the temple, bearing the yearly money-contribution, which is deli-
[794] vered to the Takkas. The collection being made, the salaries of the temple-officers and servants of the temple are paid.
[574] Then the Brahmans give a good, undefiled dinner of pure vegetable dishes, to their Coorg supporters, first, of course, eating themselves, and leaving the rest to their friends. This temple dinner is the last act in the Bhagavati festival.

527 **d. The Keilmûrta festival.**

The Keilmûrta festival is a very different affair, altogether
[787] a Coorg business. Early in the month of Leo (July—August) the Takka of the gráma calls some respectable men to